

San Marcos making changes to watering, drought rules

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San Marcos has adopted new drought rules that change when the city will implement watering restrictions and attempt to simplify the rules for residents.

Under the new rules adopted Tuesday by the City Council, the city no longer will implement water-use restrictions solely based on water levels in the Edwards Aquifer, the groundwater system that provides water for more than 2 million people. Instead, San Marcos will limit how often residents and businesses can water their lawns and other outdoor water uses based on water availability from multiple sources.

In addition to the aquifer, the city also gets water from the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority. This summer, it expects to start receiving water from the Alliance Regional Water Authority, a project to bring water from the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer, east of Interstate 35, to the fast-growing cities along the interstate. The city also will begin receiving water from Canyon Regional Water Authority in 2025, assistant director of utilities Paul Kite told the council at a workshop last month.

The new restrictions will be triggered by water consumption compared with availability, he said. City officials will take into consideration drought and weather conditions, the utility's system capacity and restrictions from the Edwards Aquifer Authority and GBRA. Those agencies manage water in the aquifer and in Canyon Lake, and reduce permit holders' allotments in drought conditions, requiring cities like San Marcos to cut their use of water from those sources.

San Marcos' drought rules were last updated in 2015. In March, City Manager Stephanie Reyes said residents have told the

city that the rules were too confusing. She said the proposed changes are an attempt to make them easier to understand.

The new rules reduce the number of drought stages from five to three. The new stages will be mild, moderate and severe water shortage.

Stage 1 would start when consumption reaches about 70% of the city's water production capacity. Stage 2 would start at 75% and Stage 3 at 80%.

In Stage 1, sprinkler irrigation is allowed two days per week, and the city will now allow watering on one weekend day. In Stage 2, that drops to one day per week, and in Stage 3 once every other week.

Drip and soaker irrigation is allowed at any time in Stage 1, only during designated times in Stage 2 and once per week in Stage 3, while times for hand watering are restricted only in Stage 3. Residential car washing is allowed one day per week in Stage 1 and Stage 2, but is prohibited under the new Stage 3 rules.

Swimming pools also will be affected by the changes. In Stage 2 conditions, draining and refilling

existing pools no longer will be allowed; and in stage 3, filling new pools also is prohibited. Previously, those rules only took effect in stages 4 and 5.

The changes effectively remove the old stages 2 and 4, which had only minor differences from stages 1 and 3.

While the changes move the city away from restrictions solely based on the Edwards Aquifer, that doesn't necessarily mean San Marcos is cutting the amount of water it uses from the aquifer, Director of Utilities Tyler Hjorth said.

While the city has worked to diversify and increase its water portfolio in recent years, the Edwards Aquifer will remain a vital water source, he said.

It's technically necessary to maintain pressure throughout the system, he said, and for at least the next 10 years, until some major capital projects are completed to modify the system, "we will always have a significant draw of Edwards water."

Water from the aquifer is also two to five times cheaper than San Marcos' other sources, Hjorth said.



Sam Owens/Staff photographer

The San Marcos City Council this week voted to revise the city's rules on drought restrictions.

